NEW DISCOVERIES IN ALANYA CASTLE: SHIP-GRAFFITI
AND SOME COMMENTS ON SHIPPING
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Z. Kenan Bilici
Ankara University
TURKEY

Alanya is an extremely interesting medieval archaeological site situated on the southern shores of Turkey. It sits on a very attractive peninsula and its most remarkable monuments belong to the Byzantine and particularly Seljuk periods from 13th century. Alanya is a fascinating point for eastern medieval Mediterranean studies, with its relatively preserved monuments, ruins and landscape. Alanya was far from the medieval power centers and main shipping lanes, with its military potential obtained by its excellent walls and towers; yet, it was the second largest port of the Seljuks opening to the Mediterranean world after Sattalia (now Antalya). This site therefore is also worthy of case studies within the framework of medieval geo-politics.

Alanya Castle is a medieval settlement which gained importance and became well known after its conquest in 1221, by the Seljuk Sultan Alâ’eddîn Keykubad I. Thereafter, it transformed into an important eastern Mediterranean harbor, and a winter throne-city as well which is called “Alâ’iyye” in attribution to its conqueror. It is not only the solely and the first medieval town of Anatolia to which a Seljuk Sultan gave his name, but a Seljuk city in Turkey which preserved its medieval urban features, historical and monumental buildings such as the city walls, Inner-Castle, Red Tower, Shipyard so-called Tersane, and “Ehmedek” (a sort of second inner-castle or chateau) and various ruins at the best. In this way, Alanya is an “archaeo-park” in itself on a most beautiful peninsula.

Although Alanya, once famous for being an important port and *palace-city* in Eastern Mediterranean, has lost this identity it had gained during the Middle Age, it still continues to tell about the story of all the physical and cultural changes that not only a city but also the people and the society have gone through with its city walls on the historical peninsula, which is a unique and natural protected area constructed both by nature and by men, its gates, monumental structures, houses most of which are ruins, streets and with its graves.
Alanya’s relation with the Mediterranean does not result merely from its being a settlement area that had been established near the sea. As a matter of fact, the shipyard, as a unique marine building, which is more than a simple image of the city, that opens out to the sea through its five arcaded divisions emphasizes that the history of Alanya has a line of fate that is dependent on the sea. This monumental construction, whose construction as a naval base was ordered by the Seljuk Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad I and which he named after himself in some kind of great jealousy, - a very rare incident in the Eastern Islamic world- continued to be a mystical center of attraction and a center of interest for many travelers who were interested in the exotic east even long after the 13th century.

No doubt, Alanya was one of the major areas of interest for Venice in Eastern Mediterranean. We know that more Venetian, Genoan, Provence and Pisan merchants settled in the Seljuk territory and founded commercial colonies/fondiculum during the reign of Alâeddin Keykubad I when compared to the past as a natural consequence of the commercial agreements the Seljuk Empire signed with the Kingdom of Cyprus and the Republic of Venice about the Levantine trade, particularly following the conquest of Alanya at the southern coast even as early as the 13th century. Perhaps due to this commercial importance, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti of Florence who wrote a guidebook for the merchants of the Middle Age felt the need to prepare an account table that comparatively showed the units of measurement used in Alanya (Candeloro) and the Italians.

It may be possible that we reach some archaeological data that will point out the existence of some Italian city-states here, particularly of Venice and some architectural ruins, such as consulate buildings that are known to have been used as courts for resolving disputes and cases Exterritorialité des lois that might have arisen in overseas commerce during the Seljuk period, as well as some shipwrecks that may be found in works carried out underwater, as excavation works carried out in Alanya proceed.

There is no doubt that increasingly more foreign ships visited Alanya Port mainly for commercial purposes starting from the second half of the 15th century in Ottoman period and in an age where Mediterranean trade began to revive after the Hundred Years War that weakened all of Europe. One of these was the attack of the Medici Navy that was commanded by Admiral Jacopo Inghirami di Volterra in 1608. There is an extraordinarily important engraving of this attack.
Other visual data that will help us witness the intensive commercial life in the city that has gone through many wars, upheavals, innovations, bright ages, falls and rises during its long history beginning at least from late 15th century may be obtained. These are not the data found in the archived documents, nor they are the ruins of buildings; surprisingly enough, these are ship-graffiti that are found on a wall in the narrow streets of a city, in an abandoned building or in hidden corners of a cistern.

Despite all their damages, the depictions discovered in recent years, contain to the physical relations and memories between Alanya and the Mediterranean as a cultural area.

The graffiti ship depictions that could be identified are, in a sense, of a nature to explain the extent of the commercial relationship Alanya had with the outer world between mid 15th century and 19th century.

It is striking that the number of ship depictions made particularly increases in the 16th and 17th centuries. Although many of these have lower pictorial quality for they had not been made as wall paintings using a certain thematic program or since they had not been designed in this way and although they have been corrupted over time it is still possible to suggest by the differences in the depicted boat models that Alanya Port received a considerable number of visits by foreign ships starting from the 16th century on. Be it for commercial purposes or for purposes of hydrographical navigation throughout the Mediterranean coasts or for meeting the needs for water and the like during a cruise by the coasts it is understood that the city has had many visitors at various periods. Western pilgrims who were permitted to visit the holy places in Jerusalem by the Ottoman Sultan may well have been included among these visitors. We will have the opportunity to learn about the countries from where they came as the flags of the ships are deciphered over time. As a matter of fact, the extent of the relation of Alanya with Europe during this period will increasingly be better understood as the amount of tangible data such as some silver medallions and coins that belong to Phillip II from late 16th century to Saxony Electorate and from the beginning of the 17th century to Spanish-Netherlands period that are known to be in Alanya and even the ibero-islamique sherds of Valencia from early 17th century increase with the help of coincidences. Another historical example of this kind is the German token from mid 18th century that I have published in 2005.
These ship-graffiti that we see today in places out of sight, in one of the narrow streets of the city, on the walls of a small unused mosque or a ruin or in some corners of closed and damp places such as the cisterns write out the history of a maritime city that has lost its popularity due to the changing conditions of the world and long distance marine trade over time. Looking at the construction stages and techniques of the buildings the depictions are made on, what we see in these depictions found on almost every building, stone or column in these coasts are not the memoirs of adventurers that dreamed of embracing the wealth of the Levant, or of the pilgrims or the travelers that wanted to reach the holy lands in the Middle Ages; nor they are the memories of a past that ruled the Mediterranean. What we in fact see are the drawings that were randomly made by the later residents of a Mediterranean town whose lives do not change much and that consist of what they vaguely remember, without being concerned about leaving visual documents for the future. It seems that almost all walls of the old and abandoned buildings in the city have welcomed various people at various periods; they resemble a large canvas on which what people feel deep inside is freely reflected. Although there are some writings between the ship depictions, it is not possible to identify what they are. Unfortunately, we will perhaps never be able to understand by whom these depictions were made. The fact that many of these demonstrate surprising workmanship details such as the anchor, sails, port hole, flag, board, and even the rope leaves no doubt that most of them were made by people who knew about the sea and the ships although the depictions were made on plaster using pricks and demonstrated a casual order. The possibility remains that some of these people were seamen who perhaps spent most of their lives in the shipyard, constructing boats to be used only coastwise. The fact that no written documents or tangible memories belonging to these seamen survived is tragic for the cultural inheritance of Alanya. Leaving aside these depictions, unfortunately, there is nothing but the names written on a few grave stones belonging to people who seem to have spent their lives in close relation to the sea that were able to survive that allow for associating Alanya with the sea. These gravestones that date back to a period between mid-1750s and early 20th century are the earliest historical witnesses of the concrete connection of Alanya with the Mediterranean.

Ships of Alanya are, in a sense, images that stop the time and drift us towards the lives once lead there, towards the expectations and curiosity. It is also possible to find the expectations of people who did not know how to read or write and who could tell about their feelings through these naïve depictions randomly
drawn on the walls of a small mosque or a cistern, and to feel the excitement the ships coming from distant places brought to them, the imagery of the places far away that perhaps someone once wanted to discover and the time that vanished away.

This study is a preliminary history research aiming to understand the historical memories and relations that are about to disappear.